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# The Holocaust as Jew-Haters' 'Gotcha'

Fourscore years after history established the legitimacy of Zionism, anti-Zionism is more popular than ever.

By Kathleen Hayes

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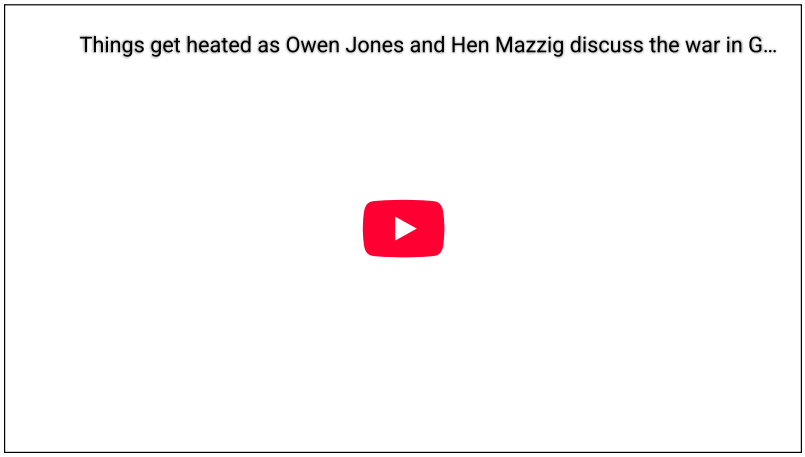
Owen Jones thinks he has it all figured out.

The British Guardian columnist and socialist appeared on Sky News recently opposite Israeli writer, Zionist activist and all-around good guy Hen Mazzig. Jones was expressing sympathy for the idea that Britain cut its arms shipments to Israel — because of course Israel should be denied arms while fighting a terrorist Islamist group committed to Israel's extinction. During his monologue, Jones referred to "Germany, which has decided to make the Palestinian people pay for the grievous crimes it committed by attempting to exterminate the Jewish people." In other words, Germany's support for Israel can only be explained by bummer emotions over the terrible thing it did years ago.




Mazzig protested: "Come on, have some decency. No, I won't let you... the memory of the Holocaust will not be used in this way. How dare you. You're not Jewish. ... This is a red line." Jones assumed the air of the unjustly accused, sniffing: "It's a very straightforward point. There's nothing offensive about it."

Mazzig performed magnificently in taking on Jones. As he wrote on Twitter afterwards, Jones is saying "never mind that thousands of Jews were butchered, beheaded, burnt alive, slaughtered, raped, dismembered, shot, tortured, kidnapped and held in captivity for the last 6 months ... any support for [the Jewish right to defend itself] — as well as the fight to dismantle the local arm of the biggest

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guilt over the last Nazi genocide."

In a sense, there's little to add to this. But because I have the dubious distinction of having once shared many of Jones' beliefs, and his passion for former British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, I think I get what's behind his determination to wield the legacy of the Holocaust against the Jews.

Germany may very well still feel some level of collective guilt about the Holocaust, but that isn't the point. Nor is it especially relevant if the 1947 United Nations vote establishing Israel had something to do with uneasy consciences about sitting by, or facilitating, the murder of 6 million Jews. No: The point about "Never Again" is that the Holocaust made widely obvious that there was no place on earth the Jews could securely exist. If two-thirds of European Jewry could be murdered in the heart of civilized Europe, their existence was in jeopardy everywhere — unless they had their own state. So the Jews were allowed to exercise their right to national self-determination in their indigenous homeland — because it had become graphically clear that Jewish survival, never mind autonomy and a measure of freedom, required a state of Israel.

Only when it comes to the Jews is national sovereignty regarded as uniquely wicked, to the point that a trendy word exists —anti-Zionist — to convey opposition to a state's very existence.

Curious, isn't it? Leftists as a rule recognize the right to national self-determination. Jones, for instance, has written for Catalonia's right to form a new nation, calling it an expression of that "basic democratic principle." The tenet is enshrined in yellowing volumes of Lenin and honored by progressives with respect to countries around the world. Only when it comes to the Jews is national sovereignty regarded as uniquely wicked, to the point that a trendy word exists — anti-Zionist — to convey opposition to a state's very existence. Leftists really should ask themselves the question I once did, setting myself on the path from Trotskyism to Zionism: Since our tradition supports the right to self-determination absolutely everywhere, why is Zionism considered shorthand for evil? The question answers itself.

Another way of considering the issue of Holocaust guilt, by the way, is to see it as a source of never-ending hostility against the Jews — for burdening non-Jews with guilt over what was done to the Jewish people. As Howard Jacobson writes in a brilliant essay, "When Will Jews Be Forgiven the Holocaust?" the answer to his titular question is "Never." "Those we harm, we blame," he observes, "mobilizing dislike and even hatred in order to justify, after the event, the harm

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blame the most."

And while Germany is the most immediate bearer of this guilt, Jacobson suggests the feeling is universal. Jews prick the world's conscience, and the world resents it. This includes the left, which nurtures itself on gratifying myths about its part in that seemingly Manichean era known as World War II. Our people were the bravest and best fighters against the Nazis, they say; how dare anyone say we have a problem with Jews?

But this legend has a disturbing way of falling apart. A glance at history reveals that those fighting under the red flag demanded that Jews reject "particularism," including Zionism, and remain in Europe to fight for socialist revolution. Revolution did not come; the industrialized slaughter of the Jews did. Jews paid the price for the failure of the socialist vision.

This genocide should have prompted not only a deep rethink on the left, but a plumbing of its soul. A hint of it came after the war by Polish Jewish Trotskyist intellectual Isaac Deutscher, who wrote that "of course" he'd abandoned his anti-Zionism. "If, instead of arguing against Zionism in the 1920s and 1930s I had urged European Jews to go to Palestine," he wrote, "I might have helped to save some of the lives that were later extinguished in Hitler's gas chambers."

But how many of Deutscher's comrades, and their ideological descendants, have shown themselves willing to reflect on their program and actions in the early 20th century — about how their dogmatic insistence that Jews rely on universalism and the solidarity of their proletarian brothers ended with Auschwitz? So fourscore years after history established the legitimacy of Zionism, anti-Zionism is more popular than ever. The last genocide of the Jews is hurled against the Jews, in support of those pursuing a new extermination campaign against the Jews, by those whose tradition regarding the Jews isn't as irreproachable as they want to believe.

"Get over it!" a member of my former party once yelled at our German comrades, who were seen as harboring neurotic, crippling shame over the Holocaust. So Jones would like Germany to get over it, and rejoin the war on the Jews, absolved and free at last of that nasty, pesky guilt.

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